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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000386

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDAN-ISRAEL RELATIONS IN NEED OF TENDING

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

SUMMARY

11. (S) Recent separate conversations with the Jordanian MFA and the Israeli Embassy indicate that both sides are letting an accumulation of irritants affect the tone of the overall relationship. We reminded both of the strategic partnership that is the base of Jordan-Israel relations, and reemphasized the importance the USG places on maintenance of good ties. We also suggested that, given the lack of progress in the peace process and Jordanian neuralgia over the separation barrier, a little tending of the garden might be needed. END SUMMARY.

THE ISRAELIS: A LIST OF COMPLAINTS

12. (S) Israel DCM Dany Nevo (protect) expressed to the DCM and PolCouns January 14 his concern that Jordan has subordinated its relations with Israel to the release of four Jordanians convicted in Israel of killing an Israeli soldier.

A Jordanian MFA team that visited Israel last week to coordinate the projected January 28 visit of FonMin Silvan Shalom to Jordan, Nevo claimed, had insisted on the release of the four and rejected a group of 18 other detainees held on criminal, visa, and security grounds. Nevo said this attitude was symptomatic of a recent downturn in Jordan's interaction with Israel, including rejection of Israeli participation in a regional fencing competition (later resolved, see para 6 below), refusal of requests for senior level exchanges (he specifically mentioned the Planning Minister and Director General of Customs), and Jordanian parliamentary calls for abrogation of the Jordan-Israel peace treaty. "Jordan asks us for prisoners, or for changes in the QIZ regulations, but wants to give nothing in return. They take us for granted."

13. (S) Nevo also expressed some frustration with his own MFA's attitudes toward the relationship, commenting that there is currently "no high-level constituency" in the MFA willing to address the slide in relations with Jordan. Nevo concluded by describing the importance of Israel's relations with Jordan, and suggested that the U.S. remind Jordan of the importance. The DCM agreed that Jordan-Israel relations, while currently strained, were strategically important to both sides. Neither side should lose sight of the benefits of those relations. For Jordan, that meant tending the relationship despite domestic opposition to relations with Israel based on the lack of progress in the peace process and popular perception of Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel should understand that this situation posed some problems for the GOJ. Meanwhile, we would continue to emphasize to Jordanian officials the importance we attach to the Israeli-Jordanian relationship.

THE JORDANIANS: THEY'RE COMPARING US TO MAURITANIA!

14. (S) Ali al-Ayed, Director of FonMin Marwan Muasher's private office, relayed similar, mirror concerns about Israel to PolCouns in a subsequent conversation January 14. Ayed said he had traveled to Israel January 12-13 to prepare for Shalom's Amman visit, and had met with Shalom and other senior Israeli MFA officials. Ayed complained that the MFA presented him with a list of "PR demands" for Shalom's visit that contained nothing of PR value to the GOJ. He posited that Israel might be delaying the release of the four Jordanian prisoners "until after they seal a deal on other releases with Hizballah," and complained about recent Likud party statements suggesting Jordan as an alternate homeland for Palestinians. Saying that Israel "takes Jordan for granted," he described a conversation in which a senior Israeli MFA official had expressed to him "no concern" about Israel's relations with the Arab world because it enjoyed quiet contacts with "Morocco, Mauritania, and even Libya." If Israel puts its relations with Mauritania and Jordan on the same level, Ayed said, Israel is ignoring the concrete benefits it gets from cooperation with Jordan.

15. (S) PolCouns reminded Ayed of the strategic importance

of Jordan's relations with Israel, both for Jordan and for the broader region. Jordan should not let irritants overshadow the importance of the relationship. Ayed agreed, noting that Jordan hopes to use the Shalom visit and the expected Israeli release of 18 Jordanian detainees to put a more positive spin on ties.

ON FENCING AND THE FENCE

16. (C) One small bilateral irritant was resolved January 14. Nevo complained that the GOJ would not permit the Israeli fencing team to participate in a regional Olympic qualifying tournament in Aqaba January 15-16. PolCouns subsequently raised the issue with Ayed, who said that the Jordan Fencing Federation had refused to register the Israelis because they were faced with boycott threats from six Arab fencing teams if the Israelis participated. Ayed called back later on January 14 to report that GOJ intervention with the fencing federation had reversed the decision. However, "they can't always expect help on fencing when they keep building the fence," he quipped lamely.

COMMENT

17. (S) Over a period of months, the Ambassador has shared his "personal" concern with a number of senior Jordanian officials that both Israel and Jordan were permitting a variety of irritants to build up, creating a potentially negative environment in the relationship. We have watched this trend develop with considerable concern.

18. (S) Recently, both sides have shown heightened sensitivity to an accumulation of irritants in the relationship -- on Jordanian curriculum reform (ref), prisoner releases, and irresponsible statements from each side's political extremes. We believe that both Jordan and Israel could do more to tend these issues in their relations and avoid unnecessary irritants, and will look for opportunities to emphasize the strategic importance of Jordan-Israel ties with GOJ officials.

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